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(U//FOUO) To mark *SID today*'s first anniversary, we wanted to honor the author of one of the many outstanding articles that were contributed during the year. We asked the readership to choose the *SID today* article that was most memorable to them. (See [the announcement](#).) Now we can announce the winner of the coveted **"Sidney" Award**! On Friday, SID Chief of Staff Charles Berlin presented the inaugural Sidney Award plaque to [REDACTED] an Intelligence Analysis intern, for her article "NISTing in Kabul and Baghdad."

(U//FOUO) The article originally ran as a two-part feature on December 9th and 10th, 2003. Here is the complete text:

(U//FOUO) Being in the field will change the way you do SIGINT forever. This is what I told the other analyst deploying to NIST Joint Task Force 20 (now 121) with me as we waited around Rhein Main airbase for three days for a flight into Baghdad. He was a very experienced analyst, one of the best we have at doing the geospatial analysis that is the mainstay of NISTs. I don't know if he believed me at the time, but after we had been there for a few weeks, he told me that I was right.

(U//FOUO) I had realized in Kabul that to be a really good analyst you have to know your customer - not just know where he is located, or talk to him on the phone once a month. To sit down with the people who will take action on your intelligence, whose lives you are helping to protect, changes your perspective on our business like nothing else I can imagine. My name is [REDACTED] and I am an IA intern who deployed to Kabul and Baghdad on NIST teams.

(S//SI) A year ago, I volunteered to go to Kabul, Afghanistan, where I worked for four months with the High-Value Targets cell comprising NSA, CIA, and DIA analysts, as well as military and CIA operational elements. After a fabulous tour in Kabul, and with the war in Iraq creating a large demand for NSA analysts in that region, I eagerly accepted an offer to head to Baghdad for two months in the summer.

(U) Everything on our little corner of the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) was tan. The sand, the tents, the HUMVEEs, the tee shirts, the food. As far as I could see, there was just dust and tents and concertina wire. At first glance, the only things that weren't brown were the white boxes that were our porta-potties. Even these were covered in so much dust and sand that they couldn't be called white anymore. It truly looked like a wasteland. There were no trees, no grass, no red cars, no yellow birds, nothing. All we had was a blue sky and the flag flying above the compound.

(U//FOUO) When I first walked into the crumbling building which served as the Joint Operations Command (JOC), I overheard someone asking whether I was someone's daughter come to visit. After four months at NIST Kabul, I was used to rough conditions, long hours, and people looking at me funny when I told them that I had volunteered to be there. I knew that there wouldn't be many other women working with me at TF-20, the elite command of all-male Special Operations soldiers tasked with prosecuting High-Value Targets in Iraq.

(U) For the first few days, as in Kabul, everyone hid their stacks of "men's magazines" and painfully avoided telling off-color jokes for fear of an EEO lawsuit. But when people asked me why I was there, I answered, "for the same reason you are." After a short while, they realized that this was true.

(U) Everyone on the compound lived in a tent city. They were magnificently air conditioned, and ours was kept pitch black inside to accommodate the various shifts that team members worked. I never unpacked anything - we all just rummaged through our bags in the dark with small red-lens flashlights. There was not much to worry about finding, since I wore the same thing every day. One of the many benefits of working for a Special Operations command was that they allowed for relaxed grooming standards and had alternative uniform regulations.

(U) While many people on BIAP had to wear full DCUs (desert camouflage uniforms) despite the 125-degree heat, we wore PT gear - black shorts and a brown tee shirt. I only donned my DCU pants when I had to get "dressed up" for a VIP visit. This was a much-appreciated blessing, since the heat was almost unbearable. When I arrived, I suffered heat cramps for a few days which made me walk around on my toes like a dinosaur. At least I was providing some entertainment for the troops, I kept telling myself.

(U) The food was bland but not bad. We had a chow hall which served four hot meals a day. Many were basically mass-reheated MREs, but the hamburgers were nothing to complain about. Living on Zulu time (Greenwich Mean Time) and not local time was an interesting experience. I went to sleep as the sun was coming up and constantly felt jet-lagged. The rest of BIAP, it seemed, was running on local time, so it added a hurdle when coordinating meetings.

(U//FOUO) The work with TF-20 was the best I've had the opportunity to be a part of so far in my career at NSA. I was lucky to be working with such an able and flexible command. Like most NISTs, we worked 7 days a week, at least 13 or 14 hours a day. Whenever an operation was in progress, which was almost every day, we worked until it was done.

(S//SI) A majority of our work consisted of identifying and tracking targets using PCS (Personal Communication Service) handsets. We worked closely with the DIA interrogators, CIA case officers, all-source analysts, and many others to produce timely, actionable intelligence. Sometimes we made PowerPoint presentations of our findings, and other times we just made our case with verbal briefings or diagrams sketched out on the white board. We did a lot of educating non-SIGINTers on our capabilities and limitations, and I learned an incredible amount about the other players in the intelligence community and military structure.

(S//SI) Too often, I noticed, what we think is urgent and earth-shattering may not be what our customer really needs. If you can't get the right product to the right person in time, it may not be of any value at all. On several occasions, we were able to hand additional threat-related information to team leaders heading out the door on an operation, just in time. Five minutes later, that same intelligence would have been just wasted time and paper. I had an amazing experience working in Baghdad and have gained a perspective on the value of SIGINT that I hope never to lose.

(U//FOUO) Congratulations to [REDACTED] the first Sidney winner! And to everyone who put time and effort into contributing articles for the SID audience: thank you!

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